

TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD 82nd ANNUAL MEETING

Route to Reauthorization

Remarks of Annette M. Sandberg Acting Administrator Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

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The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration was established on January 2000 as an agency dedicated to improving truck and bus safety on the nation's highways. The intervening three years have produced significant accomplishments as well as major challenges.

On the accomplishment side, in the face of an increase in total highway fatalities, truck and bus fatalities have declined in each of the last three years. This progress is due to a significant increase in enforcement by the FMCSA staff, and the dedicated work of our State MCSAP partners. We have increased our enforcement presence at the roadside and at the carrier's place of business - gaining ground in the face of a growing industry and increasing commercial vehicle miles of travel.

On the challenge side, the events of September 11th provided the impetus for FMCSA to focus on improving homeland security by ensuring the safe and secure transportation of hazardous materials. FMCSA personnel conducted personal visits at well over 30,000 Hazardous Materials carriers during a six-month period to advise them on appropriate security precautions. (That figure rises to more than 40,000 counting the visits of made by our State partners).

In addition, the President's decision to fully implement the cross-border access provisions of the NAFTA provided another significant programmatic challenge. Under the leadership of Secretary Mineta and with the direct involvement of Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson, the Department and FMCSA were able to achieve what many skeptics thought impossible. In a little less than 15 months six rulemaking actions, over 200 new border inspectors and auditors, and new or improved inspection facilities have been finalized and are now in place along our borders.

I am very proud of the agency's accomplishments in its first formative years. Reauthorization provides us with the greatest opportunity to focus on the core safety mission of the agency. It also allows us to establish the requisite administrative structure that allows for better performance and improved oversight of our safety mission. We must refine our programs to ensure they are effective, efficient, and implement the President's Management Agenda.

FMCSA is the Department's truck and bus safety agency. In our reauthorization proposal we will seek to improve the way we conduct enforcement and compliance activities and also strengthen our relationship with State partners. This State partnership has been the linchpin of our success.

In this regard, we are deeply gratified with the response we have received from our State partners in our efforts to implement what is known as the "New Entrant" program. The Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Act of 1999 (MCSIA) requires FMCSA to establish minimum standards for new entrant motor carriers to ensure they are knowledgeable about applicable federal safety standards. In addition to a detailed application process, the law requires that these carriers undergo, and successfully complete, a safety audit within their first 18 months of operation. The rule implementing these requirements took effect on January 1 of this year.

There are approximately 40,000 new entrant motor carriers annually. Experience tells us that new carriers, like new drivers, are more likely to be involved in crashes. With early interaction with each of these 40,000 carriers we hope to

change that. However, we would find it rather difficult from a staffing perspective, to do this alone. Therefore we have sought the assistance of our State partners in conducting these audits, and we will seek to ensure they have the necessary training and resources to accomplish this task. We will also work to help States in their efforts to improve their commercial driver licensing processes. The issue of CDL fraud has been a concern over the last several years. We want to support State efforts to improve administrative, security, and information systems in commercial driver licensing. We will seek to support State efforts to keep pace with the responsibilities placed upon them by the Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999 to more clearly address the key factor in CMV safety - the driver.

In that same vein, we will seek to continue our partnership with northern and southern border States to carry out commercial motor vehicle safety programs and related enforcement activity. This serves to strengthen not only the safety, but also the security, of our nation.

We will also address various penalties for motor carrier noncompliance with out-of-service violations and safety record-keeping requirements to ensure FMCSA staff have the authority necessary to ensure safety at the roadside. In addition, we expect to address issues involving oversight of commercial driver standards and qualifications, especially in regard to medical issues.

We need to address our research and technology capability to develop a comprehensive program to produce innovative advances in motor carrier, driver, and passenger safety and to transfer those results to potential users. Technology can have a large impact on safety downstream - but we need to make an investment to ensure that technology is deployed wisely.

We also look to build and expand our efforts to improve data collection, as well as our State partners' analytic capabilities. We strive to be a science-based, data-drive organization and program, and we currently have two projects underway that we believe will have a major impact on our future programs.

Our crash causation study, in partnership with NHTSA, is a comprehensive project to study significant truck accidents in real time and in-depth over a 2-year period. It is the first to examine causal and contributory factors in these crashes. We are hoping to learn much that may help us understand what we can do to implement countermeasures to reduce the occurrence and severity of these crashes.

We also have embarked, again in partnership with NHTSA, on an effort to improve crash reporting on commercial truck and bus crashes that involve a fatality, injury, or tow-away. The FMCSA Motor Carrier Management Information System (MCMIS) crash file is intended to be a census of all this crash information so that we may identify carriers that are "at risk". However, the information we receive from State agencies is not always complete, nor is it always accurate.

The project, known as the Commercial Vehicle Analysis Reporting System (or CVARS), is a major effort to boost crash reporting to 100 percent. By working with NHTSA and a number of pilot States, we hope to implement new data collection and reporting approaches and determine best practices that will result in critical improvements to our safety programs when implemented nationally in future years.

Finally, I can't leave without mentioning our Hours of Service rulemaking. That rule, which has been under development for rather a long time, was forwarded by DOT to the Office of Management and Budget on January 3rd. In response to any questions about a timetable for publication of a final rule, let me say at the outset: "There isn't one".

These are our major objectives in reauthorization. Of course, we will seek to continue and build on the successes of our activities with MCSAP, CVISN, PRISM, and outreach and education. Reauthorization is an exciting time for us. It offers us the unique opportunity, as a new agency, to set our course for the future. I look forward to working with all of you in

this critical endeavor to make our highways safer for the motor freight and passenger carrier industries and all highway travelers.